

large numbers of Wilmington's workers. The dominant processor of cotton for shipment was the Champion Compress Company. By 1896 there were at least four large fertilizer plants.

Other industries of note included shipbuilding and the construction and operation of area railroad facilities. By 1900 Wilmington contained a total of 131 manufacturing firms, with total output valued at nearly three million dollars. Still, Wilmington was about to be eclipsed by more progressive cities in the Piedmont, and would soon surrender its status as the state's largest city.

Within the context of Wilmington's overall economy, there is reason to conclude that many aspiring whites resented the presence and competition of blacks in the professions, as well as those in city and county government. Wilmington's black community included numerous lawyers, ministers, teachers, doctors, merchants, and businessmen. White supremacy orators struck a responsive chord in their listeners by alleging that successful blacks were enjoying luxuries and privileges at their expense.

Similar feelings of envy and resentment appear to have been widespread among working class whites as well. Sources repeatedly allude to an economic competition between black and white laborers for jobs and livelihoods. They also indicate that black workers may sometimes have occupied positions by virtue of the fact that they were willing to accept lower wages and poorer working conditions. It is significant to note, therefore, that white leaders on the eve of the Wilmington riot included demands for additional jobs among their top priorities.

Clearly related to Wilmington's general economic condition were the issues of solvency and fiscal management with respect to municipal government. The contemporary Democratic press, among its other charges, alleged that the City of Wilmington was unable to pay off its bonded indebtedness and, under the existing government, faced possible bankruptcy. Unfortunately, no conclusive evidence, either to confirm or discredit that allegation, has been found during the course of this research. An entry in the records of the board of aldermen, however, indicates that the city's leaders were closely monitoring the fiscal affairs for which they were responsible during months preceding the riot. On August 8, 1898, the aldermen approved the following specific measure with respect to the city's indebtedness:

That in accordance with section 6 chapter 25 of the Private Laws of 1891, the mayor, clerk, and treasurer are hereby authorized to issue Certificates of Indebtedness in exchange for the Bonds of the City held by the commission of the Sinking Fund now amounting to \$24,000, it being understood that all bonds so exchanged are to be immediately burned as required by law.